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ABSTRACT

Three hundred fifth grade pupils in an urban school district and in three rural schools in Tennessee participated in a study of relationships among attitudes toward reading, reading achievement, socioeconomic status (SES), and sex. Each pupil was rated on the Heathington Attitude Scale and the Hollingshead Two-Factor Index of Social Position and completed the Metropolitan Achievement Test. Although high SES females had significantly higher achievement levels than did low SES males or females and higher scores than did high SES males, there was not a consistent correlation of sex and socioeconomic status with achievement. Males and females differed on attitudes toward reading only at the low socioeconomic level. Based on the study, it appears that neither social class nor sex is a reliable indicator of how students feel about reading. Attitudes and achievement in reading are highly correlated: when ability improves, attitudes often improve; when attitudes improve, ability often improves. (TJ)

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF READING ATTITUDES TO ACHIEVEMENT, SEX, AND SOCIAL CLASS AMONG FIFTH GRADE PUPILS

Paper presented at the 1977 I.R.A. Research Symposium

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF READING ATTITUDES TO ACHIEVEMENT, SEX, AND SOCIAL CLASS AMONG FIFTH GRADE PUPILS

A careful study of reading research journals from the past two decades revealed a lack of information in the literature dealing with comparative studies of attitudinal differences among socioeconomic groups. Nor is there much research dealing with attitudes, achievement in reading, and socioeconomic class. The limited research in these areas also provide conflicting findings. While some studies may show a correlation between socioeconomic background and reading attitudes, results of other studies do not support this premise. In their article from the Journal of Educational Research, Judith Greenburg and others reported that many researchers had found that poor achievers had favorable attitudes toward school. Other research, such as that done by Margaret Dotson(1977) and Barker Lunn (1969) indicated a positive correlation between reading attitudes and success or failure in reading. The question as to whether a child's socioeconomic background influences his attitude toward learning and reading also could not be easily answered. From her doctoral research, Baker (1972) concluded that upper and middle socioeconomic groups had more positive attitudes toward reading than did the lower group. Ransbury (1973), from her doctoral research, concluded that:"socioeconomic status appeared not to be strongly related to a child's attitudes toward reading."

Almost everyone assumes that girls like to read more than boys do. In fact, there is some research to support this premise. Both Jansen (1969) and Baker (1972) concluded this from their studies.

A study was undertaken by this researcher in order to obtain data which might provide additional information to the accumulation of research

in the area of socioeconomic status, achievement, sex, and reading attitudes.

The study began with the administration of the Heathington Attitude Scale (Alexander and Heathington, 1976) to over 300 pupils in three schools in an urban school district and three rural schools in two public school systems in East Tennessee.

The Heathington Attitude Scale used in this study is a reliable and valid instrument that measures children's attitudes toward reading and includes not only attitudes toward compulsory reading such as that done at school, but also recreational reading, such as would be done at home, in spare time, or at library. To learn about children's attitudes toward reading, respondents were asked to indicate the intensity of their feelings toward statements relating to reading. Each total numerical score indicated an attitude direction, i.e., toward positive or negative.

Cumulative records were perused for information on the occupation and years of schooling of each child's father. This information was in turn applied to the Hollingshead Two-Factor Index of Social Position weighted formula to determine social class of each pupil. The Hollingshead Index was developed as an objective, easily applicable procedure to determine levels of individuals within the social structure.

The next step was to determine achievement levels for each student. Scores from the subtest area of reading from the Metropolitan Achievement Test determined achievement level. Therefore, for each pupil, three pieces of data were available: a score from the Heathington Attitude Scale determined a positive or negative direction in attitude; scores from the Metropolitan Achievement Test determined achievement levels; scores from the Hollingshead Two-Factor Index of Social Position determined

socioeconomic level. These data were subjected to an ANOVA and results were analyzed in an attempt to provide additional information concerning social class and achievement of children and how these factors relate to their attitudes about reading.

Data were analyzed using a 3 x 3 x 2 analysis of variance which assessed the effects of reading attitude of three levels of social class, three levels of achievement, and sex. Table I reveals a significant main effect for achievement, and a significant interaction between socioeconomic status and sex. Since the ANOVA table revealed a significant difference between levels of achievement, but did not reveal specific location of those differences, a post hoc procedure was applied to the data to determine at which levels the significant main effects for achievement were located. The procedure was not

TABLE I

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR ATTITUDES TOWARD READING

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Socioeconomic status	2	5771.47	2885.73	17.17**
Achievement level	2	2682.68	1341 34	7.98**
Sex	1	445.83	445.83	2.65
Socioeconomic status x Achievement level	4	598.05	149.51	0.89
Socioeconomic status x Sex	2	1209 91	604.95	3.60*
Achievement level x Sex	3	421.10	210.55	1.25
Socioeconomic status x Achievement level x Sex	4	757.66	189.41	1.13
Error	296			
Total	314			

*p < .05
**p < .001

applied to socioeconomic status since an interaction for SES x SEX was found in addition to the main effect for social status. Table II presents results of the post hoc procedure. A significant difference was indicated between every level of achievement, with high achievers having significantly more positive attitudes than either middle or low achievers and middle achievers having significantly more positive attitudes than low achievers.

TABLE II

MEAN ATTITUDE SCORES BY ACHIEVEMENT

Achievement Level	N	Mean
High	64	88.73*
Middle	65	82.40*
Low	240	78.56*

*$p < .05$

Because of the interaction of socioeconomic status and sex revealed in the analysis of variance, a post hoc procedure was applied to determine location of significant F ratios for males and females at the three levels of socioeconomic status. Table III utilizing the underlining method shows the results of that investigation. The groups (NVAR = SES x SEX) were arranged in order based in the size of their means. Then a line was drawn beneath those groups which did not differ significantly from one another. Therefore, any groups which were not underlined by the same line were significantly different from each other.

TABLE III

RESULTS OF THE MULTIPLE RANGE TEST FOR THE INTERACTION OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND SEX

NVAR	*4	1	2	6	5	3
	N = 71	N = 46	N = 29	N = 65	N = 15	N = 88
Mean	87.52	84.46	83.59	79.85	77.53	74.89

*Note: 1 = high SES males; 2 = middle SES males; 3 = low SES males; 4 = high SES females; 5 = middle SES females; 6 = low SES females.

As revealed in Table III, significant F ratios appeared between NVARS 4(high socioeconomic status females) and 3(low socioeconomic status males); between 4 and 6(low socioeconomic females); between 4 and 5(middle socioeconomic females); between 1(high socioeconomic status males) and 3(low socioeconomic status males); between 2(middle socioeconomic status males) and 3; and 6(low socioeconomic status females) and 3. Therefore, Table III shows the high socioeconomic status females had the most positive reading attitudes and were significantly higher than middle class females, low socioeconomic level females, and low socioeconomic males.

Comparing high socioeconomic level males with other groups revealed that they followed high level females in having the more positive reading attitudes. They were significantly higher than low level males.

Middle social level males had significantly higher mean scores than low socioeconomic level males. Interestingly, in this study, middle socioeconomic level males had higher mean scores than did the middle

level females. The differences were not statistically significant, however.)

Table IV reveals that males and females differ significantly in reading attitudes only at the low socioeconomic level.

TABLE IV

COMPARISON OF MEAN SCORES OF MALES/FEMALES WITHIN SOCIAL CLASSES

	N	Mean
High socioeconomic status females	71	87.52
High socioeconomic status males	46	84.46
Middle socioeconomic status males	29	83.59
Middle socioeconomic status females	15	77.53
Low socioeconomic status females	65	79.85*
Low socioeconomic status males	88	74.89*

*These two means differed significantly at the $p < .05$ level.

This study indicated that student attitudes toward reading followed no predetermined, sequential order by social class. Students cannot be divided into clearly defined social classes and then labeled by that class as having more positive or more negative attitudes than another social class. Social class alone is not a reliable indicator of how students feel about reading.

This study also revealed data which pointed out that sex is not a determiner of more positive or more negative reading attitudes. Females did not always have better attitudes toward reading than males. At upper socioeconomic levels both males and females ranked high in positive

reading attitude direction; at the middle class level, males ranked higher than females.

Data from this study revealed that achievement was highly correlated to reading attitudes. This is not to imply a cause/effect relationship, but implications can still be made from the study's results. If there is an interest in improving children's reading attitudes, then a focus on improving reading ability should be a necessary part of the program. Conversely, improving children's attitudes may be an integral part of the program, too. When ability improves, attitude often improves. When attitude improves, ability often improves. Determination of which factor influences the other is neither easy nor necessary. The main concern is that we teach reading skills and work to improve children's attitudes toward reading without allowing biases toward sex or social class influence attitudes toward children.

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